



The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism

Max Weber , Michael D. Coe , Talcott Parsons (Translator) , R.H. Tawney (Foreword by)

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The Protestant ethic — a moral code stressing hard work, rigorous self-discipline, and the organization of one's life in the service of God — was made famous by sociologist and political economist Max Weber. In this brilliant study (his best-known and most controversial), he opposes the Marxist concept of dialectical materialism and its view that change takes place through "the struggle of opposites." Instead, he relates the rise of a capitalist economy to the Puritan determination to work out anxiety over salvation or damnation by performing good deeds — an effort that ultimately discouraged belief in predestination and encouraged capitalism. Weber's classic study has long been required reading in college and advanced high school social studies classrooms.

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism Details

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Rosa Ramôa says

Max Weber (1864 – 1920), escreveu “A Ética Protestante e o Espírito do Capitalismo”, onde questionou o marxismo e o positivismo!!!

Foi ousado ao romper cânones tradicionais...

Produtivo. Estudioso. "Tocou" várias vertentes do saber...

"Colapsou-se" com a vida que teve, acompanhada da depressão :(

Político sem vocação... Nunca se perdoou...

Retomou a vida académica.

Pesquisou e repensou.

Repensou-se...

Resignou-se e desistiu.

Desencantou-se.

Rendeu-se.

Quebrou e morreu*

Hammam Nimrawi says

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Amit says

This book has and continues to receive positive acclaim. However, Weber's work is not only Euro-centric and anti-Catholic, but relies on the use of a dichotomous inclusive-exclusive framework of logic.

At the introduction of the text, the author endeavours to demonstrate the uniqueness of 'Western' civilization relative to others as well as emphasize its alleged "universal significance and value". At first glance, being different and universal appears to be paradoxical. However, the author overcomes inconsistency by using a framework that illustrates through a series of comparative examples the ways in which the west prevails as a center of universality. The universality of Western civilization is clearly understood to be a "specific" and yet solely "valid" rationalism that underlines its every cultural attribute. In systematically comparing aspects such as natural science, music, architecture, and capitalism, the author creates a narrative that does not merely reveal the differences between western civilization and non-western civilizations (particularly those of a so-called "Orient"). It also demonstrates the existence of a universal characteristic within western civilization that is lacking in the others. Thus, in implementing this framework, the author is able to develop a logically consistent assertion that the West is both distinct and universal.

By no means does Weber restrict his usage of a dichotomous inclusion-exclusion framework to his introduction. In formulating the notion of two historic opposing forces designated "spirit of capitalism" and "traditionalism", the author is able to neatly designate details in such a way as to ensure that they always contribute to and never contradict his arguments. In short, Weber's ability to categorize prevents any disruption to the logical flow of his narrative.

When evaluating the pre-Protestant moral systems, the author is able to consider Catholic morality as merely requiring "external devotion" by categorically excluding it as traditionalist. Conveniently though, when assessing Protestantism's maintenance of the pre-existing Old Testament morality, the author considers this related to the "powerful impetus" of a spirit of "self-righteous and sober legality" integral to "worldly asceticism" by categorically including it as a necessary ingredient of the spirit of capitalism. Furthermore, while Weber can include Luther's biblical notion of the "calling" as part of the Protestant Ethic's ideological chronology by considering it foundational to the spirit of capitalism, he is also able to exclude Luther's largely non-worldly interpretation of the bible by designating it "traditionalistic".

Adrian S says

I read this book as a challenge that evolved out of a heated argument I had in a bar with a friend on the socioeconomic side-effects of religion.

Although Max Weber is acclaimed as, among others, a sociologist, I must say that this book is anything but sociology. It is a heap of anecdotal short stories which might as well have been cherry-picked by an uninformed child. No statistics, no control groups, no systematic studies, nothing which would pass for even

a semblance of science in 2017.

That being said, I did like one aspect of the book, which formed the main takeaway point for me. Basically, Weber explains that there are two types of economic systems which might be both called "capitalism", but which are almost diametrically opposite:

(A) **FEUDALISTIC CAPITALISM** is the original type of capitalism that is present in all undeveloped societies. Feudalistic capitalism views the market as a zero-sum game, in which there exist masters and slaves, with the former accruing profit by amassing resources from the latter. This kind of system existed in all preindustrial societies, and continues to exist in all sub-state actors (such as gangs, drug cartels, mafia groups, etc.) as well as in modern societies which plagiarized, rather than organically developed free-market systems. It is pervasive in countries which did not undergo Enlightenment, and especially in countries where resource extraction is the main economic activity.

Feudalistic capitalism does not actively pursue innovation, and is not founded on science and discipline, but rather on cronyism, family relations, corruption, and sufficient diversion (in the form of superstitious religions and/or low-class entertainment) in order to keep the working classes from ever questioning the status quo.

(B) **KNOWLEDGE-BASED CAPITALISM** is the type of capitalism developed in Europe in tandem with the Reformation through a combination of economic prudence, the continuous re-investment of profit based on a scientific case for innovation, emotional and mental discipline, and the outright refusal to yield to personal consumerism.

This type of capitalism can be observed in successful people who drive used cars, eat oat flakes at home rather than going out, rarely buy depreciating assets, and view their profession as a calling rather than a means to sponsor their lifestyle.

The brilliance of some (but most certainly not all!) religious denominations was that they constructed a belief system which scared people, sometimes for the wrong reasons, into adopting knowledge-based capitalism for fear of burning in hell, while at the same time working hard to exterminate all traces of a belief in magic, superstition, or authority figures (ie. priests) from the religious practice of its adherents.

Laela says

In "The Protestant Ethic and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism," Max Weber explores the relationship between certain religious characteristics of Protestantism and the "spirit," or "ethos", of capitalism. He argues certain sects of Protestantism, primarily Calvinism, played a central role in capitalism's eventual cultural dominance. Weber begins with the observation that Protestants overwhelmingly comprise the business elite and skilled labor force in comparison to Catholics. According to Weber, this is true across all nationalities. However, Weber accredits this trend to the religious characteristics of Protestantism and its worldview. For the rest of his book, he seeks to defend the causality between these two phenomenon.

In order to understand Weber's thesis, it is necessary to grasp what he means by the "spirit" of capitalism. Weber does not examine capitalism through concrete data about economic markets or trends. Rather, he defines the "spirit" of capitalism as "a complex of configurations in historical reality which we group together conceptually from the point of view of their cultural significance to form a whole." According to

Weber, this conception is not a singular definition but is instead an “illustration” of a kind of an ethos. He focuses on capitalism as a cultural phenomenon, one that emphasizes the pursuit of profit as a virtuous end. The ethic of this spirit is the “making of money coupled with strict avoidance of all uninhibited enjoyment.” Weber argues that it was not accepted by society quite easily. Rather, the capitalist spirit had to overcome the influence of “traditionalism” in society. Traditionalism emphasized that people should work only insofar as it allowed them to live simply and traditionally. It did not encourage the growth of productivity or wealth. Although capitalism can also sometimes espouse traditionalist behavior, the development of the capitalist spirit is part of “a total development of rationalism and must be derived from the fundamental attitudes towards the problem of life.”

Weber asserts that the rationalist foundation underlying the capitalist spirit is derived from the Protestant idea of a “calling.” Weber’s understanding of the calling relates to the German word “Beruf” which, like the English word, means a duty or obligation that is derived from religion or God. Weber explains that the idea of a calling was central to Luther’s movement. Luther’s calling asserts that each individual has a call to abide by a worldly station or activity. Fulfilling worldly obligations was central to being obedient to God’s will. However, Weber contends that the link between Protestant asceticism and the spirit of capitalism cannot be fully located in Luther’s views. Instead, he turns to Calvinism and Puritanism. Calvinism’s doctrine primarily adopts predestination as its foundational theology. Calvinists believe that God ordains an “elect” group of people to be saved while everyone else is destined for hell. We can never ascertain who is part of God’s elect. Instead, since all individuals (saved or not) exist for the sake of God’s justice, they must end up assuming that they are saved and nonetheless try to carry out God’s will.

The Calvinist doctrine, according to Weber, created devastating effects on individuals’ psychological well-being by causing “unprecedented inner loneliness.” Calvinists are known, in fact, for rejecting sensual and tempting elements of culture. Regardless, Weber praises Calvinism for its formulations of a “logically consistent” and “rationalized” form of self-control and ethics. Weber’s emphasis on Calvinism’s “rationalism” colors his discussion of other sects. In particular, compares the relationship between emotional and ascetic practices in Pietism, Methodism, and Baptists. He argues that the Puritan idea of a calling is present within these sects’ emphasis on “systematic” obedience to God’s will. Weber is far more critical of these branches of Protestantism, but he argues that all of Protestantism’s variations emphasize the necessity of completing practical work in order to fulfill one’s religious duties.

In the final chapter, Weber returns to his main thesis regarding the relationship between Protestantism and the development of capitalism. Weber argues that Christian asceticism gave way to the idea of a calling, which in turn provided the basis of a “rational conduct of life.” Asceticism pushed people away from “monastic cells” and inner worldliness and towards “working life.” The capitalist tendency towards “uniformity” and the “standardization” of production would have never been possible without the “spiritual” idea that the ego and its desires should be fully rejected. Thus, the pervasiveness of Puritanism was the vehicle for “rational” economic development. The spirit of capitalism itself does not religious values, but the spread of certain spiritual ideas lead to its pervasiveness.

I appreciate Weber’s work for its attempt to explain how powerful social and cultural institutions have arisen directly out of religious ideas. Weber’s work was certainly foundational for modern sociological thought and methodology. However, as a student of religions, I found Weber’s arguments rather frustrating. Weber repeatedly notes that his accounts of various phenomenon are incomplete, but many of his discussions around cultural and religious ideas are entirely off-base. It is quite hard to prove that any form of religious practice or cultural symbol is “logically consistent” or “rational.” For example, his assertion that Puritans were not interested in the supernatural clearly overlooks the fact that Puritanical laws were obsessed with witchcraft and forms of paganism. Moreover, much recent scholarship has shown that Puritanism was not devoid of emotional religious experience to the extent that Weber asserts. Perhaps if Weber paid greater

attention to the lived experiences of the religions he glorifies and condemns I would be less skeptical of his descriptions. Ultimately, he lacks proper case studies and descriptions of the lived experiences of Calvinists, Catholics, and other sects of Protestantism to back up his observations.

Regardless of these flaws, Weber's work is an interesting response to Marxist theory. Weber reasons that religion is a motivator for capitalism whereas Marx would argue that economic positions are the sole determinant of evolving human institutions (including religion). Weber dramatically opposes Marx's reductionist philosophy by affirming the power of religion and its ideas. Although many such ideas, such as Luther's calling, transform in meaning and influence over time, Weber contends that these ideas carry enormous power in generating other social, economic, or cultural forces. Thus, despite my frustrations with Weber, I have respect for his work and its influence on later philosophies related to cultural hegemony and legitimacy.

Alaa Bahabri says

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Farzaneh Shafah says

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Moslem Delshad says

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Hany says

Protestants are truly enlightened. And their school of thought is the basis of western civilization today. I am a Muslim but out of fairness, I admire them.

C?r???lu says

Ai naibii de grea carte, mai ales pentru o minte profan?. Stilul lui e Weber e groaznic, cu fraze extrem de întortocheate, ceea ce face urm?rirea firului ideii foarte dificil?. O bun? parte din carte se axeaz? pe analiza dogmelor diverselor curente protestante, iar dac? nu ?tii prea multe despre ele, argumentarea lui Weber e un vîrtej în care te pierzi ?i nu mai î?elegi nimic. Ideea de baz? e îns? interesant? ?i trebuie î?eleas? în toat? specificitatea ei, de unde ?i minu?iozitatea argument?rii lui Weber. Din cauza dificult?ii lecturii, am renun?at la notele de subsol, care sunt importante ?i alc?tuiesc jum?tate din carte. Voi reveni mai tîrziu.

Voi simplifica brutal câteva idei: Etica protestant? a dat spiritul capitalismului, c?ci formele existau deja demult. Luther a venit cu ideea de voca?ie, profesie ca misiune care trebuie îndeplinit? pentru a-l mul?umi pe Dumnezeu. Calvin aduce doctrina predestin?rii. Oamenii sunt "salva?i" sau "damna?i" înc? de la na?tere. Decizia a fost luat? de dinainte de Dumnezeu conform unei logici ?i justi?ii inaccesibile omului. Omul nu poate schimba aceast? decizie ?i nici nu poate afla dac? e salvat sau damnat. Pentru a lupta cu incertitudinea ?i tensiunea interioar? ce deriv? de aici, el e chemat s?-?i confirme starea de gra?ie prin munc?, prin profesie. O munc? ra?ional?, eficient?, regulat?. C?i?tigul e semn bun ?i e l?udabil atât timp cât nu e cheltuit pe pl?ceri. El trebuie investit în munc? ?i în comunitate. Credincio?ii trebuie s? fie muncitori ?i economi: astfel ei ob?in profit pe care nu-l cheltuie, deci se acumuleaz? capitalul. Aceea?i etic? dicteaz? modul de întrebuin?are a capitalului. Acest spirit este esen?ial întreprinderii economice moderne, îns? el este apoi consumat ?i renegat de formele c?rora le-a dat na?tere.

C says

One exceptionally glaring omission - in this otherwise keen survey - is how and why (if at all) Protestantism was part and parcel of the separation from workers from the means of production and the development of the market in labor power. How did it justify this? Why did it justify it? Or did it simply not recognize this event (ideology)? While it's certainly true that Protestantism is the ideal religion to augment capitalism in society, Weber, in tracing the development from Luther, to Calvin, to Protestantism, entirely overlooks workers separation for the means of production. Odd...

Trevor says

I think you could get away with reading just chapter five of this one - that is where the guts of the argument is. It is not that the rest of the book is completely uninteresting, but it is much less interesting. It is in this

final chapter that the real thesis is worked out.

A thumbnail version goes like this. There appears to be lots more Protestant capitalists than there are Catholic ones. Also, Protestant countries tend to be more economically developed than Catholic ones - so why? Marxism would say that people's ideas are a manifestation of the economic structure they find themselves in, but Weber believes this is only partly true, although he starts off strongly opposed to Marxism, in the end he is much less certain of the limits of the role of economics in providing the base for these ideas to flourish.. All the same, he believes that there is something in Protestantism that makes Capitalism more or less inevitable and that is not present in Catholicism.

Now, given the countries picked - Italy and Spain on the Catholic side, Northern Europe and England on the Protestant side, you could possibly argue that living in a country with an incredibly bad cuisine is the problem. But Weber focuses on religion. In the last chapter he says that extreme Protestant views run something like this - God has a perfect plan which he worked out at the dawn of time. There is nothing you can do to change this plan. You don't deserve to be saved - no one does (we are all contemptible sinners and it is only God's grace which saves us in any sense). You cannot know you are saved. The only way you might 'guess' is if God rewards you. So, if you work hard and gain riches you are obviously in God's favour and therefore you might also be saved. Spending money is a sin. So, Calvinism and other extreme sects encouraged people to work hard and not to spend - prerequisites for the growth of Capitalism.

Now, that bit is the bit this book is mostly known for. But what I found interesting was the idea at the very end that becoming increasingly wealthy - like Silas Marner - also leads one to become increasingly obsessed with secular interests, not least in increasing ones own wealth to the point of a fetish and to become obsessed with worldly goods, rather than heavenly ones. So, while Protestantism is seen as a kind of prerequisite for the early development of Capitalism, ironically enough, Capitalism does not return the favour and works to undermine the extreme forms of this faith that assisted its own development.

Interesting stuff.

Barnaby Thieme says

In this masterpiece of the social sciences, Max Weber puts forth a multifactorial analysis for the relationship between the origins of capitalism and transformations in the religious, social, and economic attitudes of Protestants regarding the concept of profession or vocation (Beruf). Weber argues that the "spirit of capitalism" is rooted in the belief that worldly work is a virtue in and of itself, epitomized by the dictum of Benjamin Franklin that "time is money."

He traces the transformation of the concept of vocation through the revolutionary use of relevant German language in the Luther translation of the Bible and through its various peregrinations through numerous Protestant sects, down to the early 20th century, at which point, he argues, the concept of the intrinsic value of work persists, though its original motivating spiritual impulse has long since faded.

Elements of Weber's theory struck me as fascinating, brilliantly-conceived, and powerfully argued. I was very impressed by his insistence on employing multiple techniques in analyzing economics, theology, philosophy, history, and sociology in tandem to unpack complex historical questions - it's a refreshing exception to the all-too-common disciplinary binders we find among specialists, or worse - the tendency in German thought toward unified overarching theories or systems.

I'm not in a position to analyze his arguments on their empirical merits, but to a large degree that is beside the point. As the authors put it in their excellent introduction, "'The Protestant Ethic' has perennially survived in American sociology, and in other national traditions, too, not because of its ostensible veracity but because of its utility: its protean aptitude ... to act as a catalyst of hypotheses or vehicle of multiple projects that have little to do with the impulse that originally animated it."

I began with Talcott Parson's translation, but found it rather unreadable. Despite his importance as an original thinker in his own right, he is a mediocre translator, and I would enthusiastically recommend the Peter Baehr and Gordon Wells Penguin Classics edition instead. It is far more readable.

Czarny Pies says

Dans "L'éthique protestante et l'esprit du capitalisme" Max Weber examine une mentalité favorable au développement du capitalisme qui est née dans les populations protestantes aux pays anglophones et germanophones pendant la Réforme (1517 - 1648 C.E.) Aux yeux de Weber, ce n'était pas la montée du capitalisme qui a créé une religion pro-capitaliste protestante. Plutôt, c'était une nouvelle idéologie protestante qui a donné naissance au capitalisme industriel modern.

Weber examine tous des grands courants protestants de la Réforme (les luthériens, les calvinistes, les piétistes, les méthodistes, les baptistes et les moraves) qui avaient tous leurs propres dogmes. Notamment ils n'acceptaient pas tous la doctrine de la prédestination. Pourtant ils qui possédaient tous "l'esprit du capitaliste". Ils étaient tous contre la consommation ostentatoire et rejetaient l'idée que l'on pouvait obtenir un laissez-passer au paradis avec des œuvres de charité. Ils croyaient que "la vie monastique" était mauvaise. À leurs yeux, le bon chrétien devait avoir un métier honnête et travailler dans le monde créé par Dieu. Les buts du commerce étaient le gain financier et l'augmentation de la capitale. S'acquérir les richesses dans le but de les dépenser était un péché.

Le brio du livre de Weber est dans l'analyse qu'il fait de toutes les idéologies sous le parapluie protestant. Il défend bien sa thèse que l'esprit du capitalisme a vu le jour avant les sociétés capitalistes. La grande question est que si l'œuvre est toujours pertinente. De plus en plus le capitalisme est dominé par des pays d'Asie qui ne sont ni chrétiens ni protestants. C'est maintenant beaucoup moins clair qu'il y a cent ans que le capitalisme est un phénomène d'une société protestante.

Hadrian says

Even now, this is a profoundly interesting and detailed book, being the foundation of economic sociology, and is of considerable use today.

The main thesis is that several Christian denominations, mainly Calvinists, etc., believed that economic and social prosperity has a religious basis - that God has bestowed the gifts of success to these people, and therefore this should be imitated. Hence the Protestant Work Ethic - a religiously sanctioned form of capitalism.

As the prominence of religion waxed and waned in the centuries after reformation, and organized churches played less of a role in public life, the spirit of this work ethic still remained in many Anglo-Saxon countries. Of course, this Protestantism was not the only factor, but Weber theorizes it as the foremost factor.

It's interesting to see how parts of this doctrine have mutated into parodies of their past selves, with the 'prosperity gospel' preached by some, the link between religion and capitalism in modern America, among other outreaches.

Although some of the connections between events are rather tenuous, it is still very interesting to think about, and one crucial to modern economic, historical, and sociological debate.

Mohammad Mahdi Fallah says

A says

Protestantism is ballin'.

Amazing how much this book is about the hustler spirit: dude who'd buy in bulk, talk to his customers and push volume, figure out how to innovate to make a better product. Break with tradition. And apparently protestant women are very best at innovating, so says Weber.

Weber basically writes to Marx at a couple points, referring to "materialist" theories, basically saying that Southern US plantations had all the time and talk of capitalists but the northern homesteaders got rich. English in 1300 = a bunch of scoundrels. England after the seeing Lutheranism during the Thirty Years War = ballin'.

This was an extremely embarrassing book to read while unemployed.

Caterina says

It didn't exactly impress me nor did it convince me. I found Weber's notion of an "innocent" and idealistic capitalism where profit is not the objective and the entrepreneurs should work for the uninterrupted trading of goods and capital, totally utopian. It does not apply to our time and age, where capitalists have shown their true colours and their one and only concern: profit, whatever the cost.

So, The Protestant Ethic probably teaches us what good ideas can turn into. It is difficult to get through, not your average fun read. I found interesting the last couple of chapters where the various "branches" of

Protestantism are explained, because we don't do any courses on comparative religion at school (most people in my country can't tell a Protestant from a Catholic!).

P.S. I am very, very glad I wasn't born in a Quaker or Puritan community!

Anthony Buckley says

One of the central disputes in Protestantism had long been that between the Calvinists and the Arminians. The Calvinist believed that every person had been chosen by God in the beginning to be either saved or damned, and that there was nothing anybody could do to change his decision. These “elect” individuals could not be certain of their salvation, but they might be identified by their tendency to live lives of piety and goodness. In contrast, the followers of Arminius thought that each individual could hope to gain salvation by repenting his sins and by asking God to bestow his Grace. In the United Kingdom, Calvinism was centrally been found in Scots and Ulster Presbyterianism, while Arminianism had ruled among Anglicans and Methodists.

From the great revivals of the 1850s steadily until the Great War, this great divide began to dissipate. A new division was emerging between “liberals” and “conservatives”. Nevertheless, the old disputes limped on, still quite strenuously among Ulster Presbyterians who fought a bitter if obscure theological battle over church music. So when a list of “fundamental principles” was formulated to unite conservative Christianity, these American “fundamentalists” tiptoed carefully to avoid stirring up the old dispute. They made no mention of individuals turning to or putting trust in God, and no mention of predestination.

Weber's most famous study has its focus in the Calvinists. Calvin established a new kind of saintliness for merchants and artisans living first of all in Geneva, but later in London, Amsterdam and Edinburgh and then further afield. The piety of the Calvinists had strong echoes of an older piety found in the best of the monasteries. Like the monks, the life of a dutiful Calvinist was one of hard work and diligence, frugality and seriousness with little frivolity. Since everything was pre-ordained, this life of obedience and frugality could not be hoped to bring salvation. Rather, it was a mere subservience to God's Law which, in Calvin's system, replaced the Rule of the great monastic leaders. Calvinism also claimed the right of the Elect to rule over the non-Elect in a theocratic political system.

The monks, in pursuing pious obedience, poverty and chastity had inadvertently made their houses and their orders rich. So it was with the pious businessmen. They too lived frugally and worked hard. Without really intending to, the Calvinists made themselves and their households rich. This was the so-called “Protestant ethic” identified by Weber as giving birth to capitalism.

After the Great War, Calvinism slipped finally from view, overtaken, diluted and absorbed by the Arminian doctrine that now became Protestant “conservative” or “evangelical” orthodoxy. Protestants conservatives were now universally enjoined to turn to God, to confess their sins and put their trust in a God who would reciprocate by offering salvation. The few people who still called themselves Calvinists merely emphasised the last part of this process, the positive activity of God. There were still other movements within Protestantism, the enlightened theology of the Quakers or the Unitarians, for example, and the High Church found in Anglicanism, both of which, however, were more important as belonging to the liberal camp. But it was now a different theological world.

Eric_W says

For years we have been assaulted by politicians and religious leaders preaching the Christian "work ethic," yet I find little justification, if any, for the concept anywhere in the New Testament. I happened to be discussing this with my dad a while ago, who also happens to be one of the smartest people I know, and he recommended Weber's book. First published in 1905, it provoked considerable controversy.

Weber's thought was grounded in a belief that history is of critical portance to the social sciences and that material factors had enormous influence upon the course of history — I didn't know any of this, I'm stealing it from the introduction. Weber was very critical of Marxism, but shared with Marx a concern for the evolution of industrialism capitalism. In the first few chapters, Weber defines what he means by capitalism. It's not just the pursuit of wealth that has been common to numerous cultures, but is an activity associated with the rational organization of formally free labor (his *italics*). Capitalism requires an organized labor force and a ready source of investment capital. Some of these factors were not present in Hindu and Confucian societies. Hinduism, in particular its tradition of caste, prevented the ready organization of the labor force. Also, its emphasis on asceticism focused toward the otherworldly and afterlife, and tended to accentuate the non-material. Trade was highly developed in China as in India, but Confucianism permitted a more material focus. The Calvinist ethic combined Judaism's "ethical prophecy" that encouraged emulation of the prophet with the eastern traditions to form a philosophy of reformation, i.e. achieve salvation through reforming the world by means of economic activity.

The development of the Western city was also important because they provided the foundation for political autonomy and the creation of a bourgeois society. Eastern civilizations were hampered by strong kinship relationships that crossed the agrarian-urban boundaries which tied the cities more firmly to an agrarian tradition. The problem that Weber articulates is that the Puritan wanted to work in a calling, for his salvation. That "work ethic" was harnessed by capitalism because we have to work, the sale of our labor being the only means to material satisfaction.
